



# Teacher-written feedback: Student perceptions, teacher self-assessment, and actual teacher performance

Julie L. Montgomery\*, Wendy Baker

*Department of Linguistics and English Language, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, USA*

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## Abstract

Most research in second language (L2) writing has focused on students' perceptions more than teachers' self-assessment of teacher-written feedback. This study's purpose was to investigate: (1) how much local and global written feedback teachers give, (2) how their self-assessments and students' perceptions of this feedback coordinate, and (3) how well teachers' self-assessments match their actual performance. Teachers and students in an intensive English as a second language (ESL) program were surveyed about their perceptions of teacher-written feedback on compositions. These surveys were compared to teachers' actual written feedback. Results indicated that teachers' self-assessments and student perceptions of teacher-written feedback coordinated well, although students perceived receiving more feedback than teachers perceived giving. The coordination between teachers' self-assessment and actual performance was generally not as strong, indicating that teachers may not be completely aware of the amount of local and global feedback they give on first and later drafts. Moreover, unlike what they perceived themselves doing, teachers provided more feedback on local than global issues throughout the writing process. These findings are discussed in light of how teachers' training affected their perception (but perhaps not performance) of providing written feedback and underscore the need for examining teachers' self-assessments of their written feedback.

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## 1. Introduction

Both teachers and students feel that teacher-written feedback is an important part of the writing process (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Fatham & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1995, 2002). This is especially true for second language (L2) writing since the goal of L2 writing is often to teach both the conventions of writing in a particular culture as well as L2 grammatical forms

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [julielouisemontgomery@hotmail.com](mailto:julielouisemontgomery@hotmail.com) (J.L. Montgomery).

(Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Paulus, 1999). Though L2 writing teachers are aware of students' perceptions of written feedback and most try to give helpful feedback to their students, teachers may not be fully aware of how much feedback they give on local (i.e., spelling, grammar, and punctuation) and global (i.e., ideas, content, and organization) issues nor whether the type of feedback they feel they should give adheres to their beliefs about written feedback. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' self-assessments of their written feedback and to compare these assessments with (1) students' perceptions of this written feedback, (2) the actual written feedback given, and (3) the teachers' reactions to these findings. It is hoped that such comparisons will provide a greater understanding of how and how well written feedback addresses the needs of L2 writing students.

## **2. Previous research on students' perceptions of teacher-written feedback**

Many studies regarding teacher-written feedback on L2 writing have examined students' (not teachers') both use of and preference for different types of feedback (Enginarlar, 1993; Goldstein, 2001). Studies examining students' use of feedback have demonstrated that, though several scholars have argued that feedback is not helpful (i.e., Radecki & Swales, 1988), students still believe that it is and use this feedback to improve not only their L2 writing but L2 grammar as well (Ferris, 1995; Hyland, 1998).

In addition, studies examining students' perceptions of and preferences for types of feedback have demonstrated that students do have strong opinions on both the amount and type of feedback given by their teachers. For example, Cohen (1987) examined 217 students in various university language classes who completed surveys on the amount and the effectiveness of teacher-written feedback. The results of this study indicated that students felt that teachers do and should focus their feedback on local issues (such as grammar and mechanics) more than on global writing issues (such as ideas, content, and organization). Ferris (1995) replicated Cohen's study in a product context (i.e., in a situation where students had to complete only one draft of a composition). In her survey of 155 students, Ferris found similar results to Cohen, and also found that students are more attentive to feedback given during the writing process instead of after they have already finished a composition. Such findings demonstrate students' strong preference for local feedback and also demonstrate how and how much students use this feedback to improve their writing.

Although these studies indicate student preferences and perceptions about feedback, these perceptions are rarely compared to actual teacher feedback or teachers' self-assessments of that feedback. In fact, it is surprising, despite their importance in assessing the effectiveness of writing feedback, how few studies have examined how teachers' self-assessments relate to their use of feedback. Recently, researchers have called for research that examines the complex relationships in the classroom that affect feedback, advocating more research that compares student perceptions with teacher self-assessments and actual teacher feedback (e.g., Goldstein, 2001, 2006; Matsuda, 1999).

One study that has examined all three aspects of written feedback is Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990), which examined teachers' self-assessments with student perceptions and actual written feedback in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and native language (L1) programs in both institute and university contexts. This study found a strong link between teacher self-assessments and actual performance in all categories examined (content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics), at least in the university EFL context. While this study examined teacher self-assessment, student perception, and actual performance, it only examined the behavior of three

teachers and nine students. In addition, the [Cohen and Cavalcanti \(1990\)](#) study did not explain whether teachers were told how their self-assessments compared to the feedback they had actually given. The current study attempts to build on the findings of [Cohen and Cavalcanti \(1990\)](#) by examining a much larger database of student perceptions, teacher self-assessments, and actual teacher feedback as well as by discussing how teachers responded to the findings of the study.

### **3. Teacher perceptions (self-assessment)**

Examining teachers' self-assessments helps researchers not only to discover how aware teachers are of the feedback they give, but may in turn help teachers provide the type of feedback that they believe is important in improving student writing. Unfortunately, much like research on perceptions of writing, most research on self-assessment has focused on students' self-assessment to improve their writing performance instead of on teachers' self-assessment to improve their feedback performance (e.g., see [Yancey & Smith, 2000](#) for a discussion of this problem in L1 writing instruction), even though experimental studies have demonstrated that such self-assessment leads to improvement in a variety of situations ([Darling & Gallagher, 2003](#); [Hilgers, Hussey, & Stitt-Bergh, 2000](#)). For one, teacher self-assessment has been shown to improve teachers' affective states, helping, for example, new teachers have a more positive outlook of their jobs and their capability of "reflecting on, reviewing, evaluating, and revising their teaching practices" ([Weiser, 2000](#), p. 140).

Self-assessment can also help teachers become aware of their strengths and needs, which in turn may help teachers improve their performance. For example, [Wold \(2003\)](#) demonstrated that self-assessment helped one teacher increase her awareness of her "reflective backdrop for understanding her teaching direction" (pp. 55–56). In addition, self-assessment can help teachers step away from an idealized depiction of performance and into a more accurate reality ([Koriat, 1997](#)). In spite of this encouraging evidence of the usefulness of self-assessment, little is known about the accuracy of teacher self-assessment on writing feedback, especially in the realm of L2 writing instructors.

### **4. Teacher feedback**

Although a significant amount of research has been done on how teachers should provide written feedback in both L1 ([Smith, 1997](#); [Straub, 1996](#)) and L2 ([Ferris, 2004](#); [Truscott, 1996, 2004](#)) writing, less research has examined the amount and type of revisions teachers actually recommend students make ([Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998](#); [Goldstein, 2001](#); [Leki, 1990](#)). Those studies that have done so have demonstrated that often teacher feedback is not text specific, can be incorrect, or may not address the issues that it intends to ([Ferris, 2006](#); [Reid, 1993](#)). Moreover, other research suggests that there may be a mismatch between the feedback that students want or expect and the feedback that is actually given ([Ping, Pin, Wee, & Hwee Nah, 2003](#)).

Research examining actual teacher feedback has shown that some teachers focus more on local issues such as grammar and mechanics than on global issues such as content and organization ([Ferris, 2006](#); [Zamel, 1985](#)). Such a focus may misrepresent both the importance of these issues and the importance teachers place on them. For example, [Chapin and Terdal \(1990\)](#) found that 64% of teachers' comments were on local issues, and that when teachers focused on these local issues, students also focused on local issues in their revisions. Less is known about whether teachers are aware that they are focusing more on local than on global issues.

## **5. Feedback practices**

Should L2 writing teachers focus on local issues? The answer to this question has been heavily debated (e.g., Ferris, 2004; Goldstein, 2004; Truscott, 2004). Several studies, for example, have shown that providing feedback on local issues does not help learners make fewer local errors than does providing no feedback on such issues (Kepner, 1991; Sheppard, 1992; and Truscott, 1996, for review), and some studies have even suggested that correcting local errors leads to learners making more errors on subsequent drafts (see Truscott, 1996). One of the leading proponents of this view, Truscott (1996), has explained that such feedback may not be helpful because students need much longer to automatize grammatical rules than would happen from one draft to another. Moreover, Truscott (1996) argues that correcting local errors takes time away from focusing on aspects of writing which students have a greater likelihood of improving over the course of one writing class.

Other research, however, has shown that providing local feedback on student compositions does indeed improve learners' ability to recognize and fix their own local errors (Chandler, 2003; Fatham & Whalley, 1990), even on future compositions (Ashwell, 2000). For example, Ferris (1997) examined teacher feedback on 47 advanced English as a second language (ESL) students and examined how students responded to that feedback. Ferris found that many of the feedback comments led to substantive revisions by the students.

For the research that does advocate providing local feedback, researchers also disagree on when and how to provide this feedback. One group of scholars has noted that focusing on global issues in early drafts and on local ones in second or later drafts can be beneficial for several reasons, including avoiding having to correct local issues on sentences and paragraphs that may be deleted or changed in later drafts anyway (Ferris, 2003; Zamel, 1985). Moreover, if accuracy of local issues is stressed in early drafts, then students may feel inhibited and, therefore, limited in their ability to develop the global aspects of their compositions (Campbell, 1998). Finally and most importantly, when teachers focus on form throughout the writing process, it teaches students that the product, not the process, is most important to the teacher (Hamp-Lyons, 2006).

Other studies, however, have shown that providing feedback on both local and global issues throughout the writing process may actually help students as much as or more than providing feedback on global issues on first drafts and on local issues on later drafts (Ashwell, 2000). Moreover, more recent studies have demonstrated that corrective feedback may affect the learning of some local issues (definite articles and simple past tense) but not others (prepositions), at least for adult ESL students (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005). Thus, current research demonstrates that what local errors are focused on may be more important than when in the writing process they are addressed by feedback.

## **6. Purpose of the study**

The debate about what type of feedback is important has influenced how teachers are asked to provide feedback in writing courses at the English Language Center at Brigham Young University, where this study takes place. Although there is no official policy, at teacher training meetings teachers are taught to provide feedback on both local and global issues throughout the writing process, but to concentrate on global issues on the first draft and local issues on subsequent drafts. Teachers are also asked to focus on only one or two grammatical issues in the students' writing even on later drafts, since the focus of the class should be on teaching writing principles, not grammar. Thus, for the purposes of this study, it is assumed that teachers consider this method to be the best method for providing feedback.

To examine how teachers provide and self-assess their use of feedback, the following questions were addressed in the study:

- 1. What is the quantity and type of current teacher feedback?
- 2. What is the relationship between teacher self-assessments and student perceptions of teacher-written feedback?
- 3. What is the relationship between teacher self-assessments of written feedback and their actual performance?
- 4. Throughout the writing process, do teachers focus their comments on the aspects of writing the way they believe they should?

7. Method

7.1. Subjects

Writing teachers and their students in levels two through five (high beginning to advanced) at the Brigham Young University (BYU) English Language Center (ELC) were invited to participate in this study. Out of 15 writing teachers, 13 (10 females, 3 males) participated in the study. Ninety-eight students participated out of the 284 students enrolled at the ELC. For more information about students’ ages, proficiency levels, and native language backgrounds, see Table 1.

The teachers at the BYU ELC who participated in this study were all writing teachers, and many of them have been teaching L2 writing for several years, although some are new teachers recently admitted into the TESOL master’s program. To work at the ELC, the teachers must have at least a bachelor’s degree and must either be working on or have completed a master’s in TESOL. These teachers attend weekly training meetings in which they discuss issues they encounter in their writing courses and examine current research on these topics. Therefore, all of the teachers know many of the issues discussed in the field of L2 writing and what type of feedback is preferred by the ELC.

7.2. Procedure

7.2.1. Teacher and student questionnaires

To examine teachers’ self-assessments and students’ perceptions of the feedback given on compositions, teachers and students were asked to complete a questionnaire based on the one

Table 1  
Student information

Level	Number of participating students	Age range	Native language backgrounds
2	16	18–43	Spanish (10), Mandarin (2), Portuguese (2), Cantonese (1), Japanese (1)
3	37	18–50	Spanish (15), Japanese (10), Korean (5), Portuguese (3), Italian (2), Cantonese (1), Mandarin (1)
4	31	17–35	Spanish (18), Japanese, (3), Korean (4), Mongolian (2), Mandarin (1), Italian (1), Bulgarian (1), Cantonese (1)
5	14	21–32	Spanish (6), Korean (3), Mongolian (2), Japanese (1), French (1), Mandarin (1)

used in Cohen (1987) and Ferris (1995). On this questionnaire, teachers were asked to decide how much of each type of feedback (ideas/content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics) they gave on compositions throughout the past semester. Teachers were asked to choose a quantity for each type of feedback that represented an average of the feedback they gave across all of their students. These generalizations were requested in an attempt to both gain an understanding of specific teacher performance and general teacher beliefs about feedback. Specifically, teachers were asked to separately estimate the total amount of feedback given on first and final drafts of their students' compositions and rank the amount of feedback on a Likert scale with choices of "none," "a little," "some," and "a lot." The descriptions were supplemented with percentages that further clarified the categories: 0%, 30%, 50%, and 100%, respectively, of the amount of feedback the teachers thought was the total possible they could give. For example, if teachers thought that they commented on every grammatical error in a paper, they would mark 100%, if they purposefully marked only some of the errors, they would mark 50%, 30%, and so on. Statistical advisors noted that these percentages helped to create a more uniform definition of the quantities for participants. These categories were used instead of exact numerical counts because it is possible that if actual feedback quantities were asked, participants would have felt intimidated and unsure that they could give an accurate assessment.

Students were also asked to evaluate their teacher's written feedback using a similar questionnaire. Each question in the student questionnaire directly related to similar questions on the teacher questionnaire and also used Likert scales. For example, the question on the student questionnaire, "How many of your teacher's comments on your essay are about ideas/content?" corresponds to the question, "How many comments and corrections that you give involve ideas/content?" on the teacher questionnaire. (See [Appendix A](#) for a copy of the questionnaire.)

The teacher and student questionnaires were distributed at the end of the semester after students had completed all their compositions and had turned in their portfolios and after the teachers had finished grading the portfolios. After final exams, students were approached and asked if they would be willing to fill out a short survey. The first author was present in order to answer any questions the students may have had about any of the questions. It was assumed that after final exams would be an ideal time for giving the survey because the students would not know their final grade or worry that rating their teachers would affect their grade in the course. Teachers were also approached during this same time and asked to fill out the survey. Again, the end of the semester was considered ideal because the teachers had finished all of the grading for the semester by this time.

### 7.2.2. *Teacher feedback*

Teachers' feedback on student compositions was also evaluated in order to compare this feedback to the answers obtained from the student and teacher questionnaires. Teachers' written feedback on the compositions was evaluated by calculating frequency counts on the same types of feedback as those listed on the teacher and student questionnaires: ideas and content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Instead of a Likert scale, the actual number of feedback instances for each category on each draft was calculated.

Teacher feedback was taken from compositions in student portfolios which were collected at the end of semester and constituted a significant portion of the students' grades. Six student portfolios were randomly chosen for each participating teacher for a total of 78 (6 student portfolios  $\times$  13 teachers) portfolios altogether. In order to examine teachers' overall use of feedback independent of a student's grade, two of the six portfolios for each teacher had received a low pass, two a pass, and two a high pass grade. These grades are based on those given by two

writing teachers and another teacher who rated the portfolios as part of the student's final grade. These grades reflected a holistic score from one (which corresponded to a no pass grade, or no, the student did not perform successfully in this area) to five (which corresponded to a high pass, or yes, the student did an excellent job in this area). To ensure that the portfolios chosen were "true" representatives of each score level, only portfolios for which the two raters gave identical ratings were included in the study. Occasionally, there were no portfolios in the class that had the same score from both raters. When this occurred, portfolios were chosen which had two scores that differed from each other only by one point on the grading scale. For example, portfolios with one high pass and one pass score were used when there were no portfolios with two high pass scores, and portfolios with one pass and one low pass were used when there were no portfolios with two pass scores. This occurred for 10 of the 78 portfolios, or 7.8% of the time.

After choosing the six portfolios for each of the 13 teachers, the first author then recorded the amount of teacher-written feedback on two of the four compositions in each student's portfolio. The other two compositions in the portfolio were not included in the study because they were timed in-class compositions, which do not regularly receive teacher feedback. Although students wrote more than two compositions throughout their writing course, they only choose two for inclusion in the portfolio.

All drafts of each composition were examined—this included at least three drafts but sometimes up to four drafts for each composition. In order to accurately examine the division of feedback within the writing process, drafts were divided into "first drafts" and "later drafts." "First drafts" included the first half of the drafts, and "later drafts" included the second half of the drafts regardless of the total number of drafts for a composition. For example, if a composition had four drafts, the first two were considered "first drafts," and the last two were considered "later drafts." If an odd number of drafts (e.g., three) were given, the first two were considered "first drafts" and the later one was considered a "later draft." This was done because the first draft in such cases was usually so preliminary that it contained only a rough outline or a few short paragraphs. The majority of essays had three drafts. First and later drafts were defined this way in order to analyze feedback at different stages in the writing process and to coordinate with questions on the questionnaires. The drafts were divided into these two broad categories instead of more specific instances since the number of drafts differed from one student and from one class to another.

Each occurrence of teacher feedback among all of these drafts was categorized as ideas and content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, or mechanics—in other words, the same categories used on the teacher and student questionnaires. Feedback was categorized into each of these areas using the following general guidelines. These are the same guidelines that are given to the teachers for deciding how to rate the portfolios: content and ideas comments should focus on the student's "concrete and sophisticated ideas" and "excellent thinking and effort"; organization on "a clear purpose for writing," "appropriate use of transitions," "paragraphs in a logical order," and "ideas in each paragraph in a logical order"; vocabulary on the use of "a good variety of words" and "academic words"; grammar on "difficult and complex grammar" that has "almost no errors"; mechanics on correct "spelling," "punctuation," and "formatting."

Some types of feedback were simple to categorize, while others were more complex and were categorized depending on their context. For example, comments such as "vt" or "verb tense" were easily counted as feedback on grammar, but crossing out a word and replacing it with another could be categorized as vocabulary, grammar, or mechanics depending on whether the new word was more descriptive or appropriate, improved the grammar, or changed the spelling of the original, student-chosen word. Such circumstances were considered when categorizing each

instance of teacher-written feedback. When feedback was especially difficult to categorize, both authors consulted each other and a consensus was reached. These accounted for less than 1% of the total feedback comments.

## 8. Data analysis

### 8.1. Teacher and student questionnaires

For both the student and teacher questionnaires, numerical values were assigned to the four quantity options given on each question: “a lot” of feedback was coded as a 4, “some” as a 3, “a little” as a 2, and “none” as a 1. Numerical figures were assigned so that statistical comparisons between the two questionnaires and the actual teacher feedback could be performed. After the numerical values were assigned, the students’ responses for each teacher were averaged for each response item. This averaged number then represented the students’ score for each category of feedback for a given teacher. The teachers’ responses on the questionnaire were also converted to numerical scores. These responses were then compared to the averaged student scores for each question. The scores were also compared to actual teacher feedback as discussed below.

### 8.2. Teacher feedback

For analyzing actual teacher feedback, frequency counts were totaled for each category of feedback (ideas and content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics) on each draft of the two compositions analyzed for each student. Next, these frequency counts were averaged across all students for a given teacher for a final averaged score. Table 2 shows an example of how feedback was averaged for one teacher’s instances of grammatical feedback.

In order to compare the quantity of actual feedback with the scores given on the teacher and student questionnaires, statistical advisors recommended that an expert independent of the authors, the writing coordinator at the ELC, determine what would constitute “some,” “a little,”

Table 2  
Example of grammar feedback instances on later drafts

Student	Compositions	Grammar feedback instances
Student 1	1st	76
	2nd	0
Student 2	1st	15
	2nd	0
Student 3	1st	70
	2nd	67
Student 4	1st	0
	2nd	0
Student 5	1st	12
	2nd	40
Student 6	1st	210
	2nd	24
Average instances of feedback on all compositions		42.83



and “a lot” of feedback for each category of feedback examined in this study (ideas/content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics) for both first and later drafts. “None” was also included to categorize zero feedback.

The number of comments that represented “a lot,” “some,” and “a little” are different for each category (ideas and content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics) and draft (first or later) because differing quantities for categories and drafts more accurately described how teachers generally act when giving feedback. In particular, larger quantities were established for first drafts because student compositions are rougher at this stage; smaller quantities were established for later drafts because students should have already revised many aspects of their compositions by this point in the writing process. In addition, because global features usually encompass more than a sentence or at times even a paragraph, it seemed reasonable to assume that there would be fewer comments for global than local issues. (See [Appendix B](#) for a list of the quantities given for each category.)

These quantities were used to translate the frequency counts for each of the content categories into a similar Likert scale as that used for the questionnaires. For example, a teacher who gave an average of four incidents of organization feedback on a first draft would translate to “some” organization feedback, or a “3” on the numerical scale. These scores were then compared to the responses given on the teacher and student questionnaires.

9. Results

9.1. Research question 1

We answered the first research question of this study, what is the amount and type of feedback teachers give, by calculating the quantity of feedback in the categories of ideas and content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics for each teacher. [Table 3](#) lists the number of teachers who gave “a lot,” “some,” “a little,” and “none” feedback in each of the categories. These results show that the teachers generally gave little feedback on global issues, such as organization, and a large amount of feedback on local issues, such as grammar and mechanics, throughout the writing process. In other words, teachers gave the same proportion of feedback on each of the categories no matter whether the drafts were first or later drafts.

In addition, we also examined the average amount of feedback given for low pass, pass, and high pass scored portfolios to determine whether the amount of feedback differed depending on the score given to the paper. To compare the three groups, we performed a series of one-way ANOVAs with the average number of written comments given by each teacher as the dependent variable and the grade of the students (high pass, pass, and low pass) as the independent variable

Table 3  
Portfolio evaluation: number of teachers giving types and amounts of feedback

Feedback	A lot		Some		A little		None	
	First	Later	First	Later	First	Later	First	Later
Ideas and content	3	4	6	7	4	2	0	0
Organization	0	0	2	2	8	7	3	4
Vocabulary	1	3	2	3	9	7	1	0
Grammar	5	9	2	1	5	2	1	1
Mechanics	4	6	3	6	4	1	2	0

Table 4

Portfolio evaluation: average amount of feedback for high pass, pass, and low pass students (standard deviations in parentheses)

Feedback	High pass		Pass		Low pass	
	First	Later	First	Later	First	Later
Ideas and content	7.88 (3.06)	2.92 (7.26)	7.18 (6.81)	5.45 (8.45)	5.67 (4.37)	4.67 (4.46)
Organization	1.90 (1.27)	.56 (3.27)	1.73 (1.42)	.94 (2.28)	1.57 (4.73)	1.19 (4.35)
Vocabulary	4.88 (8.61)	4.69 (9.11)	4.27 (9.26)	5.48 (7.88)	2.98 (12.82)	3.95 (12.06)
Grammar	15.42 (18.12)	10.92 (32.02)	9.76 (19.09)	12.60 (18.06)	8.45 (13.27)	12.48 (13.41)
Mechanics	9.08 (10.22)	7.69 (15.80)	4.65 (10.28)	6.71 (7.35)	4.43 (7.24)	6.79 (56.83)

for each of the five categories of written feedback (see Table 4). Based on this analysis, we did not find that teachers provided more or less feedback depending on the grade of the student ( $p > .05$ ), although trends suggested that students with low pass scores received less feedback on global issues than did pass and high pass students. Moreover, we also found that, as is shown by the standard deviations given in Table 4, there was a large discrepancy in the amount of feedback given to each student. One of the most extreme examples was on the amount of grammar feedback given by one teacher; one student received a total of 210 comments on grammar, while another received zero comments, even though both students were taught by the same teacher and received the same grade (pass).

## 9.2. Research question 2

The second research question addressed the relationship between the teacher self-assessments and student perceptions of written feedback. The results of this analysis suggested that students and teachers agreed on the amount of feedback given for each category 87% of the time. For example, one teacher and her students both marked that the teacher provided “a lot” of feedback on mechanics. Table 5 shows the number of teacher underestimations (i.e., the number of teachers who reported giving less feedback than the students perceived getting) and overestimations (i.e., the number of teachers who reported giving more feedback than the students perceived getting) for each of the five categories of teacher feedback. As Table 5 demonstrates, teachers were much more likely to make underestimations than overestimations of their amount of writing feedback when compared to student perceptions of the amount of feedback given. These underestimations occurred mainly in the areas of vocabulary on first drafts and on ideas and organization on later drafts. Teachers were also more likely to underestimate, or state that they gave less feedback than the students perceived receiving, for later rather than for first drafts.

Table 5

Number of teacher self-assessment under- and overestimations when compared with student perceptions

Feedback	Teacher underestimations		Teacher overestimations	
	First	Later	First	Later
Ideas and content	0	5	0	0
Organization	0	5	0	0
Vocabulary	3	1	0	2
Grammar	1	0	0	1
Mechanics	1	1	0	1

Table 6

Number of teacher self-assessment under- and overestimations when compared with portfolio evaluations

Feedback	Teacher underestimations		Teacher overestimations	
	First	Later	First	Later
Ideas and content	1	4	2	0
Organization	0	0	5	2
Vocabulary	0	1	1	1
Grammar	4	3	0	0
Mechanics	4	3	0	0

### 9.3. Research question 3

The third research question examined the relationship between teacher self-assessments of written feedback and their actual performance. Table 6 lists the number of teacher underestimations (i.e., the number of teachers who self-assessed giving less feedback than they actually did) and overestimations (i.e., the number of teachers who self-assessed giving more feedback than they actually did) for both first and later drafts. As Table 6 illustrates, teachers tended to underestimate the amount of feedback they gave on local issues (grammar and mechanics) on both first and later drafts, and to overestimate the amount of feedback they gave on global issues (ideas and content, organization, and vocabulary) on first drafts. Conversely, these findings suggest that teachers gave more feedback on local issues and less feedback on global issues on first drafts than they perceived themselves giving.

### 9.4. Research question 4

The last research question asked if teachers focus their comments on the aspects of writing throughout the writing process as is guided by their discussions in writing instructor meetings and by their beliefs as writing teachers. This question addressed both teachers' beliefs about providing feedback and the quality of feedback that teachers gave. In particular, it was assumed in part that teachers' self-assessments were an accurate indicator of what they believe was the correct form of written feedback to give. Thus, a more detailed description of teachers' self-assessments compared to their actual written feedback is provided below.

The findings of this analysis indicated that in some areas teachers may not have provided feedback in the way that they believed they should. For example, the largest discrepancy between the way teachers perceived themselves providing feedback and what they actually did was their response to how much organization feedback they gave on first drafts. Though teachers all self-assessed themselves as providing "some" or "a lot" of feedback on organization on first drafts, eleven (or 87%) of the teachers gave "none" or only "a little" feedback in this category. This finding demonstrates that though teachers may have believed that they should focus their feedback on global issues like organization on first drafts as they discussed in weekly meetings, they actually did not focus on this aspect when giving feedback. In fact, very few of the teachers provided "a lot" of feedback on any of the global areas. Though some student papers may not have required revisions of global issues in first or subsequent drafts, this does not explain why teachers did not also provide at least positive feedback (praise) on global issues on the students' papers.

By contrast, many teachers gave "a lot" of feedback on local issues, even on first drafts, contrary to what they may have believed they had done. As shown in Table 2, teachers gave "a

lot” of feedback on grammar and mechanics and gave “some” feedback on these aspects on first drafts. Clearly the observance of these trends shows a difference between what the teachers believed they did (i.e., focus on local issues mainly on later drafts) and what they actually did. Moreover, teachers were also asked by the ELC writing coordinator in weekly training meetings to give only a few, specific comments on grammar and mechanics. As shown in Table 3, some teachers gave quite a bit of feedback on local errors, even up to 210 instances on one student’s drafts.

It is possible that teachers gave more feedback on local issues throughout the writing process and less on global issues because they felt that this was what was needed to help their students improve their writing. Two months after collecting and analyzing the data for this study, the first author presented the results of this study to the teachers. Most of the teachers were surprised by the findings. They had assumed that they had been focusing on global issues on first drafts and local issues on later drafts, as discussed in their weekly writing meetings. Other teachers were less surprised; they explained that they had not given more feedback on global issues as written feedback on the compositions since they had focused their discussions in class on global issues (although they still thought they provided more comments on global issues than they actually did). Nearly all the teachers, however, were surprised at how many comments they provided on local issues, especially grammar.

## 10. General discussion

This comprehensive study provides a broad understanding of how teachers’ self-assessments relate to both student perceptions and their actual written feedback. In many ways, this study confirms the findings of past research (i.e., Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 1995; Zamel, 1985) and provides additional insights into how teachers’ self-assessments relate to the writing process.

In particular, the results of this study have provided three main insights about teacher self-assessment, student perceptions, and actual teacher-written feedback. First, the results of the current study suggest that students perceived receiving more feedback than their teachers perceived giving. Students for the most part perceived that their teachers provided “some” to “a lot” of feedback on their papers. Such findings may suggest that students feel that an adequate amount of feedback is being provided and most stated that they were satisfied with the amount of feedback given in each of the areas of feedback examined. If students had stated that their teachers were giving “none” or only “a little” feedback on these issues, it may suggest that they felt that teachers gave less feedback than needed. These findings may also suggest that the teachers are providing feedback in a way that students prefer or understand. As research shows, students believe that feedback that considers their preferences is more comprehensible for them (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996). Students seemed generally satisfied with the amount of feedback they were receiving.

This finding is substantive since the number and type of comments given did not necessarily follow what the teachers believed they were doing. Moreover, it may suggest in part why teachers gave more feedback on local issues than they perhaps believed they were giving. As earlier research has demonstrated, students prefer lots of comments (e.g., Leki, 2006), especially on local issues (e.g., Cohen, 1987). In fact, students in this study felt that teachers gave “a lot” of comments on global issues, like content and organization, even on later drafts. However, the analysis of actual teacher feedback suggests that teachers gave very little feedback on these global issues. These findings suggest that students are satisfied with little feedback on global

issues and this may be in part why teachers are providing less feedback in this area than they may have believed. Such findings may even suggest that teachers are consciously or unconsciously attending to the preferences of the students, whether or not this attention fits into their beliefs about how much and what type of feedback to give.

However, the finding that students are content with the amount of feedback on global issues is surprising considering new research by [Leki \(2006\)](#) which suggests that students feel that they are not receiving enough comments on global issues from teachers, at least on discipline-based papers (i.e., papers written for their specific field of study). The difference between the feelings of our students and those of the students in [Leki \(2006\)](#) may lie in what they perceive writing teachers in an intensive English institute should do as opposed to what disciplinary teachers should do. The students in [Leki \(2006\)](#) were unsatisfied with the amount of comments on global issues and on content development, although many of them were satisfied with the amount of local comments since, as at least one of them stated, “they don’t have time to correct our English” (p. 278). By contrast, our students were in English language classes and seemed to think that addressing local errors is an important part of writing courses. More research needs to examine whether such students feel that it is not the responsibility of L2 writing teachers to address global issues.

The second major insight suggested by this study was that, when comparing teachers’ self-assessments with actual teacher feedback, it was evident that teachers did not provide the same amount of feedback to each student. While teachers are most likely right in assuming that some students simply need more feedback than others on certain compositions, from our analysis it was not clear why some students received more comments than others. For example, these discrepancies in the number of comments did not relate to the quality of the student writing, nor to the students’ levels of ability. In other words, lower-level students did not receive more comments on their drafts than did upper-level students. From a general perusal of the data, differences in the number of feedback do not even seem to relate to the number of grammatical errors students had—that is, teachers did not correct the same proportion of errors on one student’s versus another student’s paper. More research investigating the number and type of comments given (such as the number of praise versus criticism comments) is needed in order to understand why this variation in comments exists and what affect it may have on individual students. In particular, it would be interesting to discover if students receiving more comments than others have an “unfair” advantage over those who receive fewer comments.

The final important insight of this study was that in general teachers gave a substantial amount of local feedback and relatively little global feedback throughout the drafts of the compositions. Giving feedback in this manner in part conflicts with what the teachers were asked to do at the ELC and what the teachers believed they did. These findings can be interpreted in at least two ways. The first is that teachers are aware of the needs of the students and recognize that students need a great deal more of local feedback than the teachers have been asked to give. This is certainly a possibility, and their method of providing feedback follows at least in part with what some researchers advocate. In other words, providing feedback on both local and global issues throughout the writing process has been advocated (e.g., [Ashwell, 2000](#)), although most theorists suggest that either no feedback should be given (e.g., [Truscott, 1996](#)), or that local feedback be given only after most content and organizational issues are addressed in earlier drafts (e.g., [Campbell, 1998](#)).

Interestingly, 2 out of the 13 teachers correctly self-assessed the amount of feedback that they provided in each of the areas of feedback. Both of these teachers differed from the other teachers in that they provided substantial global and very little local feedback throughout the writing

process and were aware that they were doing so. Further research should explore whether these teachers' students were more or less successful than the other teachers' students in actually understanding and responding to their teachers' comments and why these teachers were more aware of the type of feedback they were providing than were the other teachers.

Aside from these two teachers, most teachers in this study were surprised by the discrepancy between the amount and type of feedback they self-assessed and the amount and type they actually gave. These teachers did not, as they thought they did, focus on global issues on first drafts and wait until later drafts to give feedback on local issues. While teachers' self-assessments and actual performance may have rightly differed from each other for a number of reasons (some of which are discussed below), such methods of giving feedback may be problematic. Giving more local feedback than global feedback on early drafts may suggest to the students that local issues are more important than global issues. Additionally, students may be reluctant to change sentences since they have been "corrected" by teachers on earlier drafts, even though these sentences may need to be eliminated or changed drastically because of suggestions on more global issues like topic development.

Perhaps the most problematic result of this finding is that the emphasis on local issues of grammar and mechanics on all drafts may suggest to students that they should prioritize local errors. This is an especially unexpected phenomenon in the ELC environment where writing teachers work to deemphasize the role of "editor" with their students. Based on the results of this study, teachers may unknowingly be strengthening the very belief that they are simultaneously working to eliminate in their students. In addition, while theorists debate on how much feedback to give on local issues, there are no theorists who advocate giving large amounts of feedback on local issues in a L2 writing composition course, where the focus is on learning principles of composition.

However, it is also possible that teachers had specific and justifiable reasons for focusing on local errors throughout all the drafts of the composition. It is possible that, for example, teachers focused mainly on local errors on first drafts because certain students asked for extra help on local errors, that teachers were unable to understand global aspects of the students' writing until they addressed local issues, or that global feedback was given in conferences or in class and therefore was not recorded on the actual text. Such reasoning is especially interesting given that almost all of the teachers gave extensive local feedback throughout the writing process, suggesting that this method is persistent even when teachers assume they are focusing on other issues. Examining why teachers deviated from what they believed are, in general, appropriate methods of providing feedback would be useful and helpful to understand whether some methods of teaching writing are simply not feasible or helpful in actual practice. In any case, this study demonstrated that the teachers found it necessary to focus on local issues throughout the writing process and to provide less global feedback than they were asked to and believed they had.

This study is a first step in understanding how teacher's self-assessments of their written feedback on L2 compositions relate to actual teacher performance and to the students' perception of this feedback. To date, little or no empirical research on the topic of the accuracy of teacher self-assessment has been given, especially in L2 writing. Even though there is little research in the accuracy of self-assessment for L2 writing instructors, it is known that this practice of repeated self-assessment leads to improvement of the behavior in question and improved teacher self-assessment and teaching for instructors of other subjects (Darling & Gallagher, 2003; Hacker, Bol, Horgan, & Rakow, 2000; Hilgers et al., 2000; Weiser, 2000; Wold, 2003). From the results of this study it appears that most teachers self-assessed their amount of different types of feedback to be consistent with the education that they received, but not in the way that they

actually provided feedback. Further research should examine whether helping L2 writing teachers become more aware of their written-feedback practices causes teachers to change how they provide feedback (or if it should do so). In other words, helping teachers match their performance to their beliefs (or helping them to change their beliefs to match what they instinctively feel is correct) seems to be a natural next step in this research. Such findings may in part help to improve the effectiveness of teacher-written feedback in L2 writing classes.

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Appendix A

Student and Teacher Survey\*

Answer the questions.

- 1. Where are you from? \_\_\_\_\_  
What is your native language? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. How long have you been in the USA? Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. How long have you been studying at the ELC? Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Who was your writing teacher this semester? \_\_\_\_\_

Choose the answer that best describes what you think. Choose only one answer.

- 1. How much of each essay do you read over again when your teacher returns it to you?

*1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> drafts*

All of it (100%)      Most of it (70%)      Some of it (50%)      None of it (0%)

*Final drafts*

All of it (100%)      Most of it (70%)      Some of it (50%)      None of it (0%)

- 2. How many of your teacher’s comments and corrections do you think about carefully?

*1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> drafts*

All of it (100%)      Most of it (70%)      Some of it (50%)      None of it (0%)

*Final drafts*

All of it (100%)      Most of it (70%)      Some of it (50%)      None of it (0%)

- 3. How many of your teacher’s comments on your essay are about:

*1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> drafts*

A lot (100%)      Some (50%)      A little (30%)      None (0%)

Organization      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

Content/Ideas      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

Grammar      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

Vocabulary      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

Mechanics      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

(punctuation and spelling)

*Final drafts*

A lot (100%)      Some (50%)      A little (30%)      None (0%)

Organization      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

Content/Ideas      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

Grammar      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

Vocabulary      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

Mechanics      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

\*This copy of the survey includes only those parts of the survey analyzed in this study. For a copy of the complete survey, please contact the first author.

## Appendix B

### Translations of feedback quantities into survey-equivalent descriptors

	First drafts Grammar	Later drafts Grammar
A little	1–2	1–2
Some	3–5	3–4
A lot	6+	5+
	Mechanics	Mechanics
A little	1–2	1–2
Some	3–5	3–4
A lot	6+	5+
	Vocabulary	Vocabulary
A little	1–5	1–2
Some	6–10	3–4
A lot	11+	5+
	Organization	Organization
A little	1–3	1–2
Some	4–8	3–4
A lot	9+	5+
	Ideas/content	Ideas/content
A little	1–3	1–2
Some	4–8	3–4
A lot	9+	5+

**Julie Montgomery** received her TESOL MA in 2005 from Brigham Young University with her thesis focusing on teacher-written feedback. She now teaches English as a Second Language at Utah Valley State College.

**Dr. Wendy Baker** is an assistant professor at Brigham Young University in the Department of Linguistics and English Language. She has taught L1 rhetoric, ESL writing, and ESL business writing classes. She is co-chair of the Teaching, Research, and Evaluation Committee (TREC) at the English Language Center at Brigham Young University.